



Hearts for *Healthcare*

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April 2022

Huntington nurse discusses pandemic, promotion

By **BRETT STOVER**
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The COVID-19 pandemic began more than two years ago now, with the first wave of cases hitting Indiana in the spring and summer of 2020.

Those positive tests began to climb slowly at first, then faster and faster – particularly during the winter of 2020 and again this past December and January. From day one and “patient zero,” healthcare workers have stood on the proverbial front lines, helping to treat and care for patients despite the chaos in the world at large.

Workers of all types have been and are continuing to be affected by the pandemic. In hospitals, doctor’s offices, urgent cares – anywhere, real-

ly – the working conditions in already-stressful fields have become much more stressful.

There’s perhaps no kind of workplace that’s been more altered by COVID-19 than long-term care facilities and nursing homes.

According to research from the Kaiser Family Foundation, a healthcare non-profit, more than 200,000 long-term care facility residents and staff have died from the virus. That’s nearly a quarter of all COVID-19 deaths in the United States as of the end of January. During the summer of 2020, KFF data shows that number was even higher – nearly half of all COVID-19 deaths were attributed to long-term care facilities during that time.

The past two years have

taken their toll on workers at those facilities. According to research from KFF, 28 percent of nursing homes reported staffing shortages in late March. That number reached as high as 33 percent in January at the height of the Omicron surge.

One nurse in Huntington County, Christina Wood, has managed to continue despite the challenges – even earning a recent promotion from floor nurse to clinical services manager at Tipton Place.

“I started off during the pandemic at Miller’s ... in Columbia City,” Wood said. “That’s when everything in the healthcare field just kind of changed. You know, residents had to be in their room, couldn’t visit family. That was the worst part of that.”

Wood, who lives in Huntington, said that the first few months of the pandemic felt as if the world had turned upside down.

“I remember driving from Columbia City back here to Huntington during the shelter-in-place thing – I couldn’t think of it,” Wood said. “I would see two or three cars going up [State Road] 9 on my way to Columbia City. I was just, ‘This is so weird. The world has shut down. It’s just craziness...’ I remember having to have permission from my administrator over at Miller’s to drive. I had to put it in my glovebox. That was crazy stuff.”

That first spring and summer changed the routines of nurses and long term care staff, as masks, social distanc-



By BRETT STOVER / bstover@h-ponline.com

Christina Wood, left, talks to a resident during bingo at Tipton Place on April 11. Wood said the “roughest part” of the pandemic was seeing the loneliness during periods of isolation.

ing and other precautions became the norm.

“Well, of course, I complained about wearing a mask at first. The challenges were you’ve got to come in; you’ve got to be screened,”

Wood said. “You know, the challenge also was [that] the residents were so isolated. A lot of of time I was not able to spend one-on-one time with them like they craved because I was really busy.”



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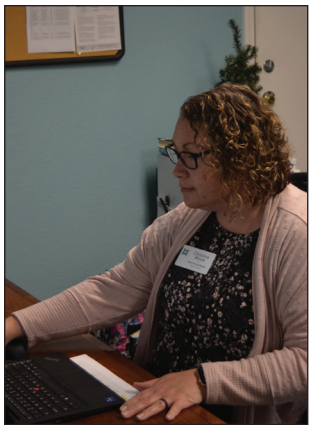


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Christina Wood works in her office at Tipton Place in Huntington on April 11. Wood was promoted to the role of clinical services manager on Feb. 13.

As homes began to limit large group gatherings, Wood said some residents became lonely and “got really depressed” – “that was the roughest part for me.”

That summer, she decided to take a job closer to home



Christina Wood (left) and Tipton Place Community Relations Manager Angela Burress (right) talk with resident Shannon Burress – and her cat – on April 11.

in Huntington. A mother of three and grandmother of two, Wood accepted a position as a nurse at Tipton Place in July 2020. Fast forward a year and a half and she received a promotion, becoming the home’s clinical services manager or “director of nursing.”

“I had been a nurse for 18 years. I wanted to go into nursing because I was always just trying to take care of people,” Wood said.

“I figured I might as well go into that,” Wood said. “I’m glad I did because I really enjoyed my journey in this. I’ve done a lot of long-term care.

I’ve worked in doctor’s offices, the walk-in clinic in Fort Wayne, and I’ve never tried director of nursing before, so I thought I would give that a shot, and I’m loving it so far.” When staff members contracted the virus, an already stressful situation became even more difficult.

We did have a lot of burn-out,” Wood said. “People would get COVID, and they’d have to be out, so the staff that was ... not [out] with COVID, they were overworked.”

Now leading the nursing staff at Tipton Place, Wood is more responsible for helping to manage the home’s workers.

“Before I took this role, I did have a pretty good rapport with the staff I have,” Wood said. “They do understand that I have to enforce the rules. That is my job, and they’ve been pretty understanding about that. I haven’t made any enemies yet, but I’m sure it will come.”

During her first few months as the clinical services manager, Wood said her first priority has been to help her coworkers feel valued.

“So far, I’ve just been showing them a lot of appreciation. We did have a staff appreci-

ation, we catered in some Mecates [Mexican Grill] for them,” Wood said. “I’m really getting good feedback on that. Everyone is working together... The schedule, you know, that was kind of in disarray when I took this on, but I got that straightened out... I’m just taking one thing at a time.”

Ultimately, the often immense difficulties of the past two years have given Wood greater insights into her profession. That perspective will likely prove useful for her as she continues in her new role. Beyond that, she said the COVID-19 pandemic has sometimes helped the public gain greater empathy and understanding of healthcare workers.

“I got thanked several times for being there for their mom or dad or whomever, grandparents,” Wood said. “They’re very appreciative.”

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Dukes Hospital and Meals on Wheels partner to serve hot meals

By **TRACY MCCORMICK-DISHMAN**

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Being disconnected from others and not having enough to eat are two of the most pressing issues facing the older adult population in the United States. But a group in Miami County, made up of hospital staff and volunteers, is working to combat those problems.

According to the Food Research & Action Center, over 2.9 million U.S. households that included an older adult (aged 65 or older) experienced food insecurity or poor access to food in 2018.

“The Meals on Wheels program has been around for at least 30-35 years and Dukes has always been a partner,” said Kim Black, Nutritional Services Director at Dukes Memorial Hospital. “Simply having a hot meal during the day for a person who is elderly and homebound can assist in keeping them out of an extended care facility.”

Meals on Wheels delivers one hot meal for lunch or dinner, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. The meal consists of a hot entrée with one potato side, one vegetable side, bread with butter, and a drink. The cost of the program is \$3.00 per meal billed monthly.

Dukes Hospital purchases and provides the food for the program. “Even though it is a self-paid program at \$3.00 per meal, this is nowhere near the complete cost of maintaining the program,” stated Black. “It’s been \$3.00 per meal for as long as I can remember and I’ve worked at the hospital since I was a teenager.”



Photo contributed

The Dukes team of dietitians prepare hot meals for Meals on Wheels.

Black and the professional team of dietitians at Dukes create the menu for each client based on questions of likes and dislikes at the time of starting the program. The team also keeps clients’ needs and wants up to date.

“I deliver the first meal to new clients myself, not only because each person means a lot to us, but it is important to me that our clients feel comfortable with who is coming to their home and to put a face to the voice they hear when they call me,” continued Black.

The Dukes team of dietitians not only prepares daily menus and prepares the hot meals, but packs all of the orders for volunteers to deliver to the program clients.

“Our maximum meals that the dietary team and I can fill in one route is 60 meals per week or approximately 700 meals per year,” said Black.

“At this time, we only have one route, but could use two routes to keep up with the de-

mand,” said Black. “We lost a lot of our volunteers over the past couple of years due to the pandemic.”

The most common volunteer job is delivering meals and friendly greetings to homebound seniors. This involves picking up meals at the hospital and delivering them along a pre-determined route directly to the homes of people within the city limits.

“As a volunteer, you need a valid driver’s license and one hour per day, Monday through Friday, no holidays,” said Black. “Once you’re done with your route and return to the hospital, each volunteer receives a free meal.”

Tom Languell has been a volunteer delivery driver for Meals on Wheels for five years. “I love helping the elderly and seeing the people,” said Languell.

“Don’t sit at home. Just do it,” continued Languell when asked what he would say to

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Parkview Wabash Hospital president retires, but not from helping others

Marilyn Custer-Mitchell now leading Waypoint Wabash

By **ROB BURGESS**
Wabash Plain Dealer Editor

Marilyn Custer-Mitchell has been in the healthcare industry for more than 35 years and was, until recently, the president of Parkview Wabash Hospital.

And though she just retired from that role, she still has work to do helping others.

Retiring from Parkview Wabash Hospital

Custer-Mitchell joined Parkview Health as president of Parkview Wabash Hospital in 2015. She previously served as president and CEO of Wabash County Hospital for more than seven years. She has more than 25 years of experience in healthcare, having served in leadership roles at hospitals in New York, Kentucky and Indiana. She earned a master's degree in health administration from Indiana University, Bloomington. Before moving to Wabash 14 years ago, she was the president and COO for Corning Hospital in Corning, New York. Custer-Mitchell is a board member for Grow Wabash County and served as the chairman of the board for Waypoint Wabash. She was previously on the Board of 85 HOPE, Wabash County United Fund, the Indiana Hospital Association and the Indiana Rural Health Asso-



Photo by Rob Burgess / Plain Dealer

Marilyn Custer-Mitchell, center, helps set up the first local COVID-19 vaccination clinic in January 2021 at the Wabash County Museum.



On March 22, Debra Potempa, MSN, RN, NEA-BC, was named president of Parkview Wabash Hospital, effective April 18.

Provided photo

Marilyn Custer-Mitchell has been in the healthcare industry for more than 35 years and was, until recently, the president of Parkview Wabash Hospital.

Provided photo



ciation. She is also active in the Wabash Rotary Club, Tri Kappa and the Wabash First United Methodist Church. Marilyn and her husband, Pat, have one son and daughter-in-law, JP and Abby Mitchell. Both are Northfield graduates and currently reside in Wabash County.

In a recent phone interview, Custer-Mitchell said she was "very excited" about her then-upcoming retirement.

"I've always said I would retire when I was 62 and I can so I am," said Custer-Mitchell, laughing.

Custer-Mitchell said she'll

miss the people more than anything.

"There's no question," said Custer-Mitchell. "The co-workers here. ... I've been blessed throughout my career and to work for Wabash."

Custer-Mitchell said she had "some great memories" of her time at Parkview Wabash Hospital.

"Joining the Parkview system was a big decision for us and probably one of the most important things for the future of our hospital," said Custer-Mitchell. "One of my

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Grant County students prepare for future in healthcare

By **THOMAS HARDING**
GrantConnected.net

As healthcare students approach graduation, they also move closer to tests, residencies and job opportunities.

Indiana Wesleyan University senior nursing major Riley Lamb said, “(I’m) just finishing up classes and taking the Comp Predictor so that I can take the NCLEX. (I’m) prepping for the NCLEX as well.”

Passing these assessments enables students to enter the healthcare field after graduation. The Comp Predictor serves as an NCLEX pre-test and helps nursing students gauge how prepared they are for the NCLEX.

The NCLEX is the official exam of the National Council of State Boards of Nursing.



By Thomas Harding / GrantConnected.net

Ott Hall of Sciences and Nursing is the newest academic building on the IWU campus containing state-of-the-art teaching laboratories, research laboratories and student interaction areas. The building is home to the IWU School of Nursing, the Division of Natural Sciences, and the School of Health Sciences.

Passing this exam enables nursing students to earn their nursing licenses.

Pre-med students prepare for exams such as the Med-

ical College Admission Test or the Dental Admission Test, depending on what they want to study after earning their bachelor’s degrees.

Parker Nueman, a junior biology and pre-med major at Taylor University, said he plans to pursue a career in dentistry. He is preparing for the Dental Admissions Test.

“A lot of dental students are required to take the Dental Admissions Test, which is very similar to the MCAT,” he said. “It covers topics ranging from general chemistry, organic chemistry, biology, a little bit of psychology, and possibly ecology.”

After passing the exam, Nueman will have more education to complete before practicing dentistry.

“(There’s) four years of dental school. It’s two years didactic, learning in the classroom while doing lab work,” he said. “The remaining two years are more clinical. While it’s still clinical,

you are still doing classwork. After (graduating), I could potentially be going into a residency program, which could last anywhere from one to three years.”

Additional education is not required for graduating nursing students. If accepted, they can be working immediately in hospitals, clinics or doctors’ offices, pending the results of their NCLEX.

“I just accepted a job in Indianapolis,” Lamb said. “I will be a nurse in a cardiovascular critical care unit.”

Ethan Crary, an IWU senior nursing major, has a job lined up in Portland, Maine.

“I’m going into the emergency department. I’ll get oriented on the unit for 12 weeks. I’ll just follow a nurse for that time, and then I’ll get started,” he said.

MEALS

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other people who are considering driving as a volunteer.

Seniors threatened with hunger and social isolation make up the core of Meals on Wheels clients. Each person has unique needs, however, typically there are physical or financial challenges to their ability to eat healthy meals and move freely about their community.

“I have managed and spent my time with this program for many years because of the people”, said Black. “Providing a hot meal every day for folks and visiting with them makes me feel good.”

If you would like to request meals for yourself or for a loved one, contact Kim Black at Dukes Memorial Hospital 765-472-8017 or kblack@dukesmemorialhosp.com.



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RETIRE

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favorite memories is the day we moved to the new hospital. Our staff was phenomenal. After months of planning, we executed the move, closing one facility and opening the other, getting every single patient transferred to the new hospital, tucked in and eating breakfast in the new facility in less than one hour. Our leadership team and staff who planned the implemented the move was just phenomenal. It was amazing.”

Custer-Mitchell said she particularly enjoyed working with the local Parkview Wabash Hospital Board, which is made up of residents.

“They make decisions and recommendations about the services we offer and how we do things, always keeping in mind what is best for the people of Wabash County,” said Custer-Mitchell. “That’s important as every county has different needs and we have a really strong board here.”

Custer-Mitchell said during her career in the healthcare industry, many things have changed, but nothing more so than technology.

“Even on the business, administrative side. Years ago almost everything pen and paper and computers were limited to the finance department. Technology all the way around. Clinically it’s been leaps and bounds. Great improvements for patients,” said Custer-Mitchell.

Custer-Mitchell said throughout her career in the healthcare field, she has “worked for some really great leaders.”

“Probably the best advice is still the simplest, the Golden Rule, treat others as you’d like to be treated. I wish I could say I always

did this, but I do try,” said Custer-Mitchell.

Opening a new chapter at Waypoint Wabash

On March 21, a few days after her retirement plans became public, Waypoint Wabash, a substance use recovery home for women, announced that the organization’s board of directors had appointed Custer-Mitchell to serve as the organization’s first-ever executive director.

When Custer-Mitchell’s retirement from Parkview Wabash became official, she began her new role with Waypoint Wabash, said Josiah White’s Compass Rose Academy vice president of advancement Kevin Trotter.

“I am thrilled to continue working with Waypoint on opening the women’s recovery home in Wabash,” said Custer-Mitchell. “This home will provide hope and a safe place for women in Wabash and surrounding counties to continue their recovery. We have a strong, community-centered board and have had phenomenal support from the entire county to date.”

Waypoint exists to provide a safe, structured, and stable environment for people recovering from substance use and disorder and its mission is to “serve as a waypoint between chaos and living free in safety and structure.” Waypoint, in partnership with Indiana Landmarks, is in the process of renovating the home at 189 N. Wabash St.

“We’re still working on renovating the house and the renovation has actually picked up quite a bit,” said Custer-Mitchell. “The mechanical, electrical and plumbing is going on now. Some floors are being laid. Things like that. We’re hoping to open this summer.

That’s our goal.”

Waypoint will begin accepting applications for program participation this spring.

“Our board is excited and very thankful that Marilyn has agreed to lead Waypoint as our first Executive Director,” said Jay Driskill, Chairman of the Board. “We are confident that with her tremendous heart for our mission, coupled with her strong administrative and leadership skills, Waypoint will quickly impact many women on their road to recovery. Marilyn’s vision and passion to help build and develop a strong program will provide the perfect foundation for Waypoint as we begin serving the women who will enter our home. We want to thank everyone in our community who has helped us, and we simply would not be where we are without each one of you.”

Potempa to lead Parkview Wabash Hospital

The following day, March 22, Debra Potempa, MSN, RN, NEA-BC, was named president of Parkview Wabash Hospital, effective April 18, said Parkview Health public relations manager Tami Grigle.

“On behalf of the Parkview Wabash Hospital Board of Directors, I’d like to thank Marilyn for her dedicated leadership and service to the Wabash community,” said Parkview Wabash board of directors chairman Howard Halderman. “Beginning at Wabash County Hospital, she led the transition to Parkview, including the move to an entirely new hospital. Her work to help design and develop that facility will leave a lasting impact for generations to come. Marilyn blessed Wabash immensely through her

service at Parkview Wabash and many other organizations throughout the Wabash community. We are confident that Deb will continue to lead Parkview Wabash with a heart for our patients and in the best interests of our caregivers. We are excited to welcome her to the leadership team.”

Potempa joins Parkview from Mercyhealth, which serves northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin, where she was most recently system chief nursing officer and vice president of hospital operations. Her experience also includes leadership roles at Provena Health System and The University of Chicago Hospitals.

“I am eager to get to know the team at Parkview Wabash and the community as a whole,” said Potempa. “This hospital is already so successful. My hope is to con-

tinue to build on that success to best serve Wabash and the surrounding communities and make a positive impact on the health and well-being of our patients.”

Among Potempa’s extensive nursing background and operational leadership experience, she successfully led Mercyhealth to its second system-wide Magnet designation by the American Nurses Credentialing Center in 2019. Before her multiple nursing leadership roles at Mercyhealth, she served as service line director for critical care and cardiopulmonary services at Provena Mercy Medical Center.

“Deb’s experience in hospital operations, paired with her vast clinical nursing background, enables her to lead Parkview Wabash Hospital with a thorough understanding of patients’ and co-workers’ needs,” said

Parkview Health healthcare operation president Rick Henvey, president. “Under her leadership, this incredible team will surely continue to thrive in delivering on Parkview’s brand promise of excellent care for every person, every day.”

Potempa holds a master of science degree in nursing from St. Xavier University and a bachelor of science in nursing from DePaul University, both in Chicago. She is a board-certified nurse executive – advanced and a graduate of The Kellogg School’s Executive Education Program for Nurse Leaders. She is also a member of the American College of Healthcare Executives and the American Organization of Nurse Leaders.

Rob Burgess, Wabash Plain Dealer editor, may be reached by email at rburgess@wabashplaindealer.com.



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